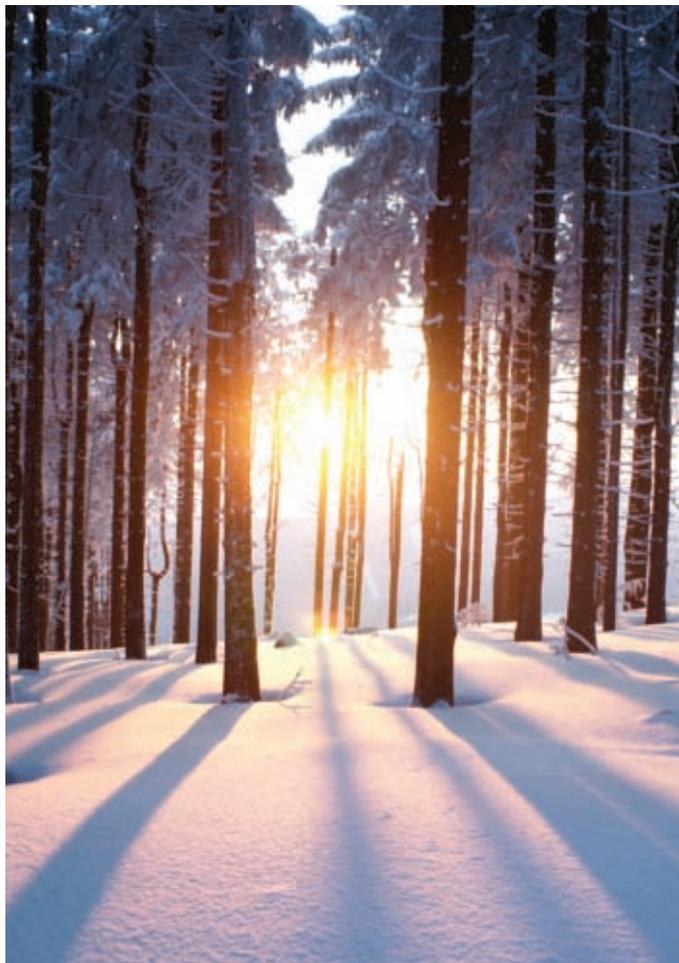


FEBRUARY 2014

TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

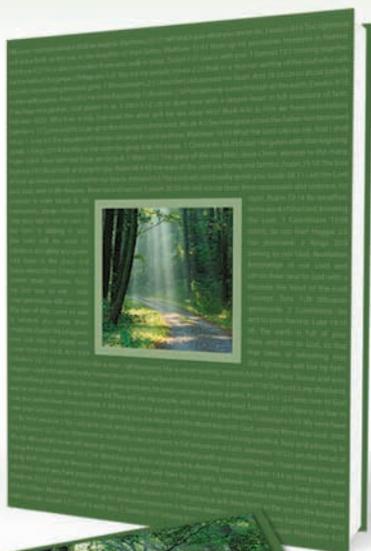


There is a time
for everything
and a season
for every
activity under
the heavens.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Teach Us to Number Our Days:
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TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Redeem the Time We Have



How quickly time passes! At the end of last year, Cheryl and I celebrated the birth of our third grandchild, Cordelia Rose Nyquist. She was born on the 30th birthday

of our daughter, Natalie. Thus, Cordelia became the first girl in our family in 30 years. It hardly seems like it was 30 years ago that we held our first little girl in our hands. The years have flown by quickly. And while I have no regrets, I also know I am in the last third of my life here on earth. It brings urgency to each day and also a desire to enjoy life, enjoy relationships, and love well.

Collectively, humans mourn the swift passing of time. We say, "How time flies" or "Time slipped away from me." We mourn this loss of time because it is completely out of our control. The seconds and minutes and hours are relentless, ticking ever forward. We cannot stop it or reverse the process. Time is a distinctive limit of the human condition.

It is comforting, then, to know that the God we serve is the creator and controller of time. In Genesis 1:14, God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years."

While time is finite, God is eternal. He is not limited or bound by time. "Even from

everlasting to everlasting, You are God," declares the psalmist (Ps. 90:2). Because of His eternal nature, God does not change. He does not experience aging or the loss of His abilities. He exists outside the effects of time.

Even God's name suggests His eternal nature. He declares His eternal identity to Moses, saying, "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). He is the beginning and the end. He has no start and will have no finish.

While God Himself is beyond time, He is aware of the passage of time and its effects on us. In Ecclesiastes, the author reflects on God's creation of time and humanity: "He [God] has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (Eccl. 3:11). We experience an internal conflict between our eternal calling and our present condition. We are designed for eternity yet restricted—for now—to life on earth. We feel an eternal tug on our hearts to consider life from God's perspective.

Friends, this month as we study time in *Today in the Word*, I encourage you to be mindful of our need to redeem the time we have while looking forward to our eternal destination. Each day, created and controlled by God, is a precious gift. We enjoy this temporal life, knowing that our God, the creator of time itself, has designed us for eternity.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



God, Time, and Eternity

In William Shakespeare's play *King Henry IV* the Archbishop of York observes, "We are time's subjects." All creation is subject to time, but God is the eternal Creator and is Himself uncreated. Because God is eternal He is not bound by the limits of time any more than He is bound by the limits of space. God existed before time began and will continue to exist forever. He is God "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 90:2).

The eternal nature of God means that His existence stretches in an infinite direction both before and after creation. It also means that God does not relate to time in the same way that we do. Our experience of time is finite. Although we possess eternal souls that will exist forever, we are created beings who did not always exist (Ps. 139:13). Consequently, our experience of time is linear, a succession of moments. We experience the present, remember the past, and anticipate the future.

Because God is infinite in knowledge, power, and presence, His relationship to time transcends our limited and linear experience. To Him "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8; cf. Ps. 90:4). God "works out everything in

conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ps. 139:1-4; Eph. 1:11).

Although God is not bound by time in the same way that we are, He does have a temporal dimension to His experience. At the incarnation Jesus Christ, who existed as God from eternity past, took to Himself a human nature that He did not previously possess. With respect to His human nature, Jesus shared the linear experience of time-bound creatures (John 1:1, 14). He lived out His ministry in a succession of days, He knew what it was like to wait and to experience longing for the future (Matt. 17:17; Luke 12:49-50; John 4:7-8; 11:6). In the birth, death, resurrection, and second coming of Christ the redemptive purpose of God unfolds according to a divinely established timeline. The eternal Savior came to die for the ungodly "at just the right time" (Rom. 5:6). The time when Jesus will return and establish His kingdom has been determined by the Father (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7). Time serves God's purpose.

We may be subject to the limitations of time, but time is not our master. The same God who established the regular cycle of day and night, summer and winter, or seedtime and harvest also orders the seasons of our lives (Gen. 8:22). Our times are in His hand (Ps. 31:15).

For Further Study

To learn more about relationship between God, time, and eternity read *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* by Paul Helm (Oxford University Press).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Heather Moffitt

An Act of Love

February is often considered the time to commemorate love and romance. Valentine's Day falls in the middle of the month, often celebrated with gifts of flowers, chocolates, and jewelry. Like so many special occasions, it has nearly become yet another excuse for consumerism, as if the only way to express your love is to go shopping.

There's nothing wrong with buying gifts to express love, but this month we invite you to consider another act of love that's available to us through *Today in the Word*. As you know, *Today in the Word* is not a traditional publication that you receive through a subscription. We are part of a relationship with friends and supporters who appreciate this ministry. They value having *Today in the Word* by their side as they study God's Word and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. A gift of any amount to the ministry of *Today in the Word* and Moody Bible Institute ensures that you receive this publication for a year.

You might not know that we also try to make *Today in the Word* available to people who have no possible way of financially supporting the ministry. We believe that reading, studying, and applying Scripture is important and should be accessible to anyone, regardless of their ability to send a financial gift. This is especially true for our many readers who are incarcerated. We send *Today in the Word* to 541 prisons across the country. Currently *Today in the Word* is also sent

to readers overseas, some of whom are unable to send financial gifts. We send *Today in the Word* to readers in 69 countries around the world.

We frequently hear from our readers in prison, and while we always appreciate hearing from everyone who takes a moment to send us a note, I think it's safe to say that the letters from prisons express some of the deepest gratitude for this ministry. I'd like to share one of these letters that we received a few months ago:

I am not sure how to express to the people there at Moody what has happened to me since I started receiving Today in the Word. I don't even know who submitted my name for your mailing list, but I am so very grateful to whoever it was.

I am an inmate at a Correctional Center in Illinois doing a 23-year sentence. I was on the verge of ending my life when out of the blue I received this mail a little over a year ago. It was an issue of Today in the Word! At first, I didn't get much out of it, but continued reading it for lack of nothing else to do. Next I received a Bible from a church (I still don't know who submitted my name), but now that I could read and look up the Scriptures along with my lesson for the day, I started feeling something besides shame, guilt, and pain.

Continued on page 36

VOLUME 27 ISSUE 2

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

A Biblical View of Time

Many of us view time as something we want to control. We organize it grammatically, living by three tenses—past, present, and future. We schedule our lives with clocks and calendars. We complain about never having enough time, whether it's hours in our day or years in our life.

A hundred years ago, French writer Marcel Proust self-published the first volume of his epic seven-volume, 3,000-page panorama of a novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. Early in the book, the narrator has his famous tea-and-cake revelation: As he dips a small sponge cake, *madeleine*, into his herbal tea, a whole world of memories and experiences from his past is released. Proust associated the fleeting of time with the experience of memory.

This month in *Today in the Word* we'll look at what the Bible says about time—seasons of our lives, fleetness of time, faith, and waiting on God. We'll see that God redeems our past, strengthens our present, and gives us a hope and a future. We'll see that our lives, like a sponge cake dipped into tea, are infused with God's love and mercy.

So, take a plate of madeleines or just a cup of tea, and let us go on a journey through the pages of the Bible. Our prayer is that we become like men from Issachar in the book of 1 Chronicles, "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chron. 12:32). Let us learn to understand our times and to use the time given to us for God's glory.

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God Is Lord Over All Times and Seasons

Daniel's wisdom is on display in the narratives and prophecies in his book. The verses prior to today's reading, for example, demonstrate that he knew the right thing to say in the right way at the right time, both when he questioned the commander of the king's guard and when he petitioned the king to allow him to have more time.

For such wisdom, Daniel gave all the credit to God, who as Lord over all times and seasons always and infallibly knows the right thing to do at the right time (v. 21). King Nebuchadnezzar had demanded that his wise men recount and interpret a dream without being told what it was. They were unable to do so, but during a night of prayer Daniel received this knowledge from God. Impressively, Daniel praised God (vv. 20–23) going to the king to save the lives of himself and his friends (v. 24). They were by no means well known

at court yet. This incident occurred only one year after they had been taken into exile (1:5).

To exalt God as the sovereign Lord was a huge step of faith, considering that Daniel was a foreign exile slated for execution. He even dared to assert that his God was greater than the emperor (vv. 37–38). God had paved the way for His name to be glorified in this unlikely place at this unlikely time, and in the end Nebuchadnezzar gave Him praise (v. 47).

He changes times
and seasons.

Daniel 2:21

This month's devotional is a topical study of time. What does the Bible say about time and our use of it? We've divided the study into four main sections that reflect Scripture's main themes in this area: (1) times and seasons in life; (2) knowing the right times; (3) our stewardship of time; and (4) the fleetness of time and brevity of life.

Apply the Word

Though Daniel did not seize the moment for selfish ambition (v. 30), God saw to it that he was rewarded anyway (vv. 48–49). Since God is Lord over all times and seasons, the fact is that self-centered ambition is always out of season. In Paul's words: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

Pray with Us

We'd like to start the month by praying for our Donor Resource Management staff: Sharon Cluff, Norma de Jesus, Patricia Fletcher, and Kyella Gilliam. They appreciate your prayers for their day-to-day responsibilities of keeping us connected to our donors.

Fourth Day of Creation

The Sandhills of western Nebraska are perfect for stargazing. No big cities are there, and thus virtually no manmade light to get in the way. Every summer, hundreds of amateur astronomers go there to take advantage of the dark night skies. Those who are willing to make the drive are treated to breathtaking views. As one said: “This is how the Native Americans saw the sky. This is how the pioneers saw the sky.”

These stargazers receive a small taste of the beauty of the fourth day of creation. On this day, God created the sun, moon, and stars.

Like everything else He made, they were pronounced “good” (v. 18). Interestingly, the verb “made” (v. 16) or “fashioned” indicates that these objects were already in existence in some form, likely from the first day when light was created, and that God now specifically fashioned them into the astronomical bodies we know today. This

would fit with the interpretation that in the creation narrative the first three days are “forming” while the next three are “filling.”

The purpose of the sun, moon, and stars is to mark the boundaries of day and night, and as they govern this basic division they also serve to mark life’s “sacred” times and seasons (Ps. 104:19). This function led to these heavenly bodies being worshiped and mythologized as deities in many ancient Near Eastern religions. God, however, intended us to see these created objects as reminders of

His faithful covenant love (Ps. 136:7–9; Isa. 40:25–26). In context, the direct allusion is to the feasts and holy days set forth later in the Pentateuch. In general, it makes sense that the One who is Lord over all times and seasons has ordained times and seasons for us.

Let them serve
as signs to mark
sacred times, and
days and years.

Genesis 1:14

Apply the Word

Enjoying the beauties of creation and giving God praise for them is always a good use of our time! When was the last time you went stargazing? Or paused to appreciate the blazing palette of sunset? Or took a quiet walk in the forest? Henry David Thoreau wrote, “An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day.”

Pray with Us

Continue to pray for our Donor Resource Management employees: Dona Lorange, David Kocourek, Amelia Mendez, and Hector Quiles. As they process our donors’ donations and mail, praise the Lord together with them for His faithful provision for Moody.

God Appoints Times for Specific Events

Laughter is an extraordinarily flexible act of communication. It often indicates joy, happiness, or humor; but depending on the culture, circumstances, and individual, it might also signal embarrassment, grief, or even despair. A laugh can be crazy, sarcastic, skeptical, or relieved. It might convey surprise, scorn, agreement, or pleasure. It all depends.

In today's narrative, Sarah's laughter signified doubt or faithlessness (v. 12). It might also have been bitter, cynical, or just sad. She had overheard one of the visiting strangers tell her husband that "about this time next year" she would have a son (v. 10). Given that Sarah was past the age of childbearing—or in plain language, she had already been through menopause—and that she had been barren her whole life thus far, she laughed for obvious reasons. Yet the stranger condemned her doubt and insisted on his prediction (v. 14), which Abraham received as

a promise from the Lord Himself. Both he and his wife would have remembered God's recent similar promise (Gen. 17:21). The issue was whether they would respond in faith—Abraham did, but Sarah did not. Later, though, she would laugh in faith and joy because God kept His promise and gave her a son (Gen. 21:6–7).

Is anything too hard for the LORD?

Genesis 18:14

This narrative teaches that God can appoint times for specific events, such as the birth of a baby. This doesn't mean that God chooses to script all events in this way, but it does mean that He is able to do so if He wills it.

We don't know the details of how He works, but we can still affirm this truth. Abraham and Sarah were told that Isaac would be born at a certain time, and he was (Gen. 21:2). Isaac's birth was completely impossible from a human perspective, but God's plans and timing don't depend on human wisdom or limitations.

Apply the Word

Hospitality is also a Christian virtue, though in our busyness we too often neglect it. Two books that might be helpful in learning more about this topic are *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, by Christine D. Pohl, and *Table Grace: The Role of Hospitality in the Christian Life*, by Douglas Webster.

Pray with Us

Founder's Week conference, held annually at Moody since 1921, starts today—a special time of teaching and fellowship. Please uphold in prayer Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, as he speaks at the opening session.

God Appoints Times for Rhythms of Life

To commemorate the end of hostilities in World War I, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11 as Armistice Day, to be celebrated with parades and public festivals. In 1954, Congress re-named the holiday Veterans Day. The purpose, according to the Veterans Administration, is “to honor America’s veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.”

Veterans Day is a time to remember. Our calendar includes such times and seasons, and Israel’s calendar did, too. God appointed recurring festivals and “sacred assemblies” to mark the rhythms of their public or congregational life. The creation narrative had already reminded them of this (see Feb. 2), and now the Mosaic Law set up specific feasts and holy days. These included a weekly Sabbath, an annual Passover festival, and a rare Year of Jubilee (every 50 years). Three annual religious festivals anchored the nation’s calendar (Ex. 23:14–17).

These are the
LORD’S appointed
festivals, the sacred
assemblies.

Leviticus 23:4

These appointed times were serious business. God promised that when Israel strayed from obedience to His prescribed days and seasons, especially the Sabbath, then redeeming those times would become part of the justice of the punishment. The land would have its Sabbaths—the people could participate in God’s guarantee or suffer the consequences (Lev. 26:34–35).

The phrase “sacred assemblies” in verse 4 highlights the main purpose and character of these appointed times as centered around worship.

The focus was clearly to be on God. For example, the Sabbath, as a day of rest, reflected God’s actions in creation (Gen. 2:2–3; Ex. 20:8–11). Similarly, the Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread, commemorated the Exodus from Egypt, when God had worked mighty wonders and freed His people from slavery. The Passover lamb would later become a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice (see 1 Cor. 5:7).

Apply the Word

What “sacred assemblies” mark the seasons of life in the church today? On a weekly basis, Sunday is our typical day for meeting together. Annually, Christmas and Easter have become our major holidays. The preaching and teaching of the Word, music, prayer, giving, and other practices help us focus on the Lord during these holy seasons as part of the rhythms of our spiritual lives.

Pray with Us

Today you can encourage in prayer our Customer Service Center employees, as they answer hundreds of phone calls daily helping Moody’s friends receive all the necessary information they request about the Institute.

Wisdom Is Knowing Times and Seasons

Americans aren't sleeping enough. A recent national survey found that we sleep an average of seven hours per night. That's about two hours less than 40 years ago, and significantly less than the recommended eight-and-a-half hours. Sleep deprivation has been linked with heart attacks, obesity, anxiety, lower productivity at work, and other negative consequences.

Often it seems we literally don't know when it's time to be awake and when it's time to sleep. As today's verse reminds us, "there is a time for everything." Godly wisdom is about knowing the right time to do or not do something. It's about knowing the times and seasons of life. This is one of the spiritual keys to living well. Wisdom, metaphorically speaking, is a house built on a firm foundation with rooms filled with treasures (Prov. 24:3–4).

Most of today's passage is a poem, structured as a list of opposites or contrasts.

We're told that there is a time for each one of these activities, but we are not given an absolute formula to know when. Some are universally human (birth, death, love, hate), others are historically specific (war, peace). Some are life-changing (kill, heal), others appear small or common (tear, mend). Some are rhythms of work (plant, uproot, build, tear down), others are more emotional or relational (mourn, dance, speak, remain silent).

To say "there is a time for everything" is not relativism, which is the view that there are no moral absolutes or that whether actions are right and wrong depends on individual or group opinions. Rather, the point of saying "there is a time for everything" is that we should make it our goal to know when those times are. Biblically speaking, we're talking about *application*, the ability to discern when and how to apply the truths of Scripture.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Apply the Word

If wisdom means knowing the right thing to do at the right time in the right way with the right priorities, how can we get it? The book of James says we can ask God (1:5). Sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit in specific moments and contexts is essential to learning and practicing godly wisdom and to having the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2; Col. 1:9).

Pray with Us

Founder's Week continues on Moody's Chicago campus—a busy time for our Operations departments headed by Executive VP and Chief Operating Officer Steven Mogck. Thank the Lord for all the behind-the-scenes support these departments provide.

Wisdom Is Speaking a Word in Season

The book of James gives several memorable pictures of the tongue (3:3–12). These include a bit in the mouth of a horse, the rudder of a ship, a spark that starts a forest fire, a spring of water, and a fruit tree. From these images, we learn that though the tongue is small its power is great, that our speech has a high destructive potential and is difficult to control, and that our words indicate the spiritual state of our hearts.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about the tongue and our use of language. This is a specific example of the godly wisdom considered yesterday—the kind of wisdom that knows the right time for doing the right thing. Knowing what to say and how to say it in any given situation is a universal challenge, one that James describes as virtually impossible. But if we could tame our tongues with

God’s help, how much better our lives would be!

The key proverb for us in today’s reading is verse 23: “A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!” Joy here is in part a feeling of happiness or pleasure (Prov. 24:26). But it

is more than just a feeling. Joy is seen here as a moral quality and a great benefit to the individual and the community. God Himself is often pictured as speaking an apt or timely word to His people.

How good is a
timely word!

Proverbs 15:23

The proverbs preceding today’s verse help give us a fuller picture of wisdom. Godly wisdom includes patience and peacemaking (v. 18), a strong work ethic (v. 19), respect for one’s parents (v. 20), finding joy in what is good or right (v. 21), and the humility to listen and receive advice from others (v. 22).

Apply the Word

In order to make progress in growing in wisdom, we encourage you today to choose one of the proverbs from today’s reading to apply. Are you hot-tempered or quick to pick a fight? Verse 18 is for you. Do you spend too much time as a couch potato? Verse 19 can help. Whichever verse you choose, depend on the Lord to cultivate His fruit in your life.

Pray with Us

Founder’s Week gives Moody students opportunity for spiritual growth and service. Another opportunity is Practical Christian Ministry. Pray for the PCM’s staff, Gloria Alicea, Don Martindell, Unity Ostercamp, Roberto Rivera, and Nathan Strand.

Faith in Times of Trouble

David's words of praise in Psalm 9 take on even more significance when we realize how long he waited and how much trouble he endured before becoming king of all Israel. Anointed as a teenager by Samuel, David waited for about two decades for God to keep His promise. During these years, he survived King Saul's murderous jealousy, life as an outlaw on the run, and numerous other hardships.

Despite his experiences, David did not lose faith. Some times and seasons in life are bound to be negative, of course, since "man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). At these times especially, faith is the best response, for God is our only sure "refuge" and "stronghold" (v. 9). The foundation of faith is the fact that we trust in One who never lets us down. He is absolutely faithful and has promised never to leave us or forsake us (v. 10; Deut. 31:6). To

"know your name" means to know God's character and to stand firm in Him.

This doesn't mean that times of trouble aren't painful. They can feel like battles, with enemies attacking us on every side. But God fighting for us turns the tide in our favor (vv. 3–6). We feel protected

and upheld. Enemies "stumble and perish before you." That "the memory of them has perished" indicates the completeness of His victory. In fact, God didn't even have to fight in a traditional way. Since He is "enthroned as the righteous judge" and "rules the world in righteousness," all He has to do to

win a victory is to pronounce judgment (vv. 7–8). At His word, the nations are rebuked and the wicked destroyed.

Since God is Lord over all times and seasons, we can certainly trust Him with our own times and seasons!

The LORD is a refuge
for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times
of trouble.

Psalm 9:9

Apply the Word

Are you in a season of trouble or suffering? Does it feel as though life is full of enemies making war on you? Are you tired of waiting for God's goodness? Do not fear—He's already present and working on your behalf, if not on your timetable. Let David's words in Psalm 9 become yours: "I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High" (v. 2).

Pray with Us

We are thankful for Moody Radio! Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, requests your prayers for the expansion of this ministry to reach more listeners around the globe with the online and mobile technology.

Righteous Lives Bear Fruit in Season

"I think that I shall never see / A poem as lovely as a tree," begins the poem "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer. Just twelve lines long, this famous poem is often quoted (and parodied). It vividly depicts the beauty of nature in lines such as, "A tree that looks at God all day, / And lifts her leafy arms to pray," and concludes, "Poems are made by fools like me, / But only God can make a tree."

Psalm 1 teaches that a righteous person is "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season" (v. 3). Thinking of our lives in terms of times and seasons means that just as times of trouble and hardship will come, times of blessing and fruitfulness will also come into our lives. The image of a tree is a rich one, suggesting spiritual rootedness, satisfaction, health, and growth. A similar tree pictured by Jeremiah "does

not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit" (Jer. 17:8).

What is the key? The fruitful tree is a picture of the kind of person who continually meditates on and delights in God's

Word (vv. 1–2). Such a person avoids the way of wickedness and is firmly committed to the way of righteousness. The wicked are an exact contrast, for instead of being a green, fruitful tree, they "are like chaff that the wind blows away" (v. 4). (Chaff is the useless part of wheat.)

They have no place among the people of God and are on the road to destruction (vv. 5–6). The righteous, on the other hand, know that the Lord watches over them at all times. Whether times of trouble or times of blessing, it's all about God!

That person is like
a tree planted by
streams of water,
which yields its fruit
in season.

Psalm 1:3

Apply the Word

Jesus also used a natural picture to illustrate spiritual fruitfulness. He spoke of Himself as the true Vine and described us as branches that must "remain" or "abide" in the Vine (John 15:1–8). To lose our connection is to wither away. He said: "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (v. 4).

Pray with Us

Scott Curtis, James Haan, Perry LaHaie, and Jack Haveman proclaim Christ over the airwaves at Moody Radio West Michigan, one of our 36 radio stations, located in Zeeland, MI. We pray for God's blessings on their ministry.

Gospel as a Time of Refreshment from God

In *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer wrote that our “obligation to God . . . includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably.” The fact is, however, that we do not do so. When an unsaved person falls under conviction of sin, “the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear. The gospel can lift this destroying burden from the mind, give beauty for ashes, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

The gospel lifts burdens in so many ways! It is redemptive refreshment from God Himself. If people will turn from their sins and seek forgiveness from the Lord, He will bring times of refreshment and revival. The gospel tells the good news of salvation in Christ. This is the turning point in God’s plan, the biggest “change of season” in history!

Turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Acts 3:19

In the days following the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter had healed a beggar and drawn a crowd. In his sermon, he told them that the miraculous healing demonstrated God’s power, as seen especially in Jesus Christ.

He framed Jesus’ death and resurrection in somewhat personal and accusatory terms: “You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead” (v. 15). The bigger picture, however, is not their misdeeds but God’s plan for His Messiah, as foretold throughout the Law and the prophets (vv. 17–18, 24–25; also see Acts 2:23–24).

From a human perspective we need to repent, for we are sinners in need of God’s mercy. From a divine perspective we are invited to repent, for He intends us to enjoy life and “times of refreshing” through His Son (vv. 19–20).

Apply the Word

Peter spoke to a crowd in Jerusalem, but through the pages of Scripture he speaks to us as well. The call to repent and turn to the Lord is still there. The truths of the gospel are still powerful. The Living Water can still refresh your soul. If you have never asked God to forgive your sins and give you life in Christ, make today the day!

Pray with Us

We invite you to thank God for the faithful service of Robert Moore and John Rogers at Moody Radio South. Please pray for the Lord’s guidance as they minister to their listeners in Alabama and beyond.

Time Is Beyond Us, So Make Plans in Faith

Part of American culture is the belief that planning ahead is a source of security. Retirement accounts, college savings plans, and life insurance policies are marketed on this basis. The idea is that we can control certain future variables through our present actions. In this sense, planning ahead is supposed to give us peace of mind.

For us as well as for his original audience, James had a warning: time is not under our control. Plans happen or don't as the Lord wills. Security is found in God alone, not in any preparations we make for the future, no matter how prudent. Today we begin our second major section in this month's study.

While the first section focused on general truths concerning times and seasons in life, this section addresses specifically knowing the right times. Some passages remind us about attitudes or activities it's always the

right time for; others are exhortations to attitudes or activities needed at specific times.

James particularly addressed merchants or businessmen in the church. Making plans or gaining wealth is not wrong in and of itself. These activities do, though, tempt one to act in ways that are self-centered, greedy, or exploitative. Apparently these individuals had in fact been guilty of boasting and arrogance (v. 16).

In terms of time, their attitude was both wrong and foolish, given that we do not even know what will happen tomorrow. Our lives are but a "mist" (v. 14; Ps. 102:11). Rich people tend to feel powerful and able to get what they want and do what they wish. James popped their pride balloon by reminding them of their human finitude and limitations. Since God is Lord over all times and seasons, saying "if it is the Lord's will" demonstrates wise humility (v. 15).

You ought to say,
"If it is the Lord's
will, we will live and
do this or that."

James 4:15

Apply the Word

Do you have plans? If you're American, this is like asking a zebra if it has stripes—of course you do! Plans for lunch, for vacation, for the holidays, for shopping, for the next task on your to-do list, for everything! One need not be a well-to-do businessperson to have the wrong attitude addressed by James. "If it is the Lord's will" is a timely watchword for all of us.

Pray with Us

Media represent an integral part of Moody's life and outreach. We invite you to pray for Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, in his responsibilities of over-seeing Moody Radio and Moody Publishers.

Waiting on God's Timing for Victory

The city of Jericho might be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Its existence as a walled or fortified city dates back to at least 3200 B.C., and its origins have been traced by archaeologists to at least 7000 B.C. The name "Jericho" means "moon city," probably indicating that it was a center of moon worship. The people there had made the classic mistake of worshipping a created object rather than the Creator (see Feb. 2).

For Joshua and the people of Israel to defeat this ancient city and its ancient pagan religion would be a significant spiritual victory. So God made sure that this battle took place on His terms and the victory won according to His plans. In many ways this is the archetypal biblical narrative of a plan that didn't make sense, humanly speaking. In the end, though, God's timing is perfect, even when our understanding is not.

Shout! For the LORD
has given you
the city!

Joshua 6:16

Because the plans and intentions of the Israelites were obvious, Jericho was shut up tight, its people safe behind the walls—or so they thought. They must have wondered what those Israelite people were doing, marching quietly around the city for six days. Many of the Israelites might have wondered the same thing! But God had promised a victory, and they followed Joshua in faith. They were led by the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant (v. 8), a reminder (they were good at forgetting) of the God who had brought them this far already.

On the seventh day, the Israelites carried out the rest of God's plan. They sounded the trumpets and shouted, and the walls of Jericho collapsed (Heb. 11:30). They went in and, as commanded, spared no one but Rahab and took spoils only for the Lord's treasury. God had won the victory over the Canaanite gods, just as He had over the Egyptian gods.

Apply the Word

"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). Waiting for the victory to be finalized, however, can be difficult. We can take encouragement from stories like today's, knowing that just as it was God who won battles in days past, so also the same God can and must be trusted for victories in our own day (Ps. 44:1–8).

Pray with Us

Join us in prayer for Moody Publishers Marketing: Janis Backing, Parker Hathaway, John Hinkley, and John Matsuoka. As they reach out to new audiences, pray for effective use of new and existing media outlets and for presenting MP titles in a fresh way.

After a Spiritual Drought, Time for Revival

A well-known early twentieth-century hymn prays: “God of grace and God of glory, on Thy people pour Thy pow’r. / Crown Thine ancient Church’s story; bring her bud to glorious flow’r. / Grant us wisdom; grant us courage for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.”

When such prayers are made frequently and passionately, God often responds by sending a season of revival. This was certainly the case in today’s reading, when a time of spiritual drought was followed by a time of spiritual revival. That’s the good news. The bad news is that a revival is by definition preceded by a time of sinning, and that was the case here as well. Thankfully, God had long ago anticipated this very sequence of events (Deut. 4:25–31).

King Asa had been doing “what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Chron. 14:2), but he was swimming against the current of his times. God,

though, encouraged him to act boldly for righteousness, first with a military victory (2 Chron. 14:9–13), and in today’s reading with a prophetic word from Azariah, who is otherwise unknown (vv. 1–7).

Asa had already made a few modest reforms, and now he obeyed God, took courage, and acted even more zealously to combat Israel’s spiritual unfaithfulness. He destroyed the people’s pagan idols and restored the altar of the Lord in the temple. The people “saw that the LORD

his God was with him” and the revival gained momentum (v. 9). The nation of Judah came together for a national assembly, during which they offered sacrifices, worshiped the one true God, and wholeheartedly renewed their side of the covenant (v. 12). As He had promised, “They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them” (v. 15).

If you seek him,
he will be found by
you.

2 Chronicles 15:2

Apply the Word

Revival comes when believers earnestly seek the Lord. Sowing repentance and a soft heart leads to a harvest of the fresh breeze of the Spirit. In the words of Hosea: “Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unending love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you” (Hosea 10:12).

Pray with Us

During your time with the Lord today please pray for Ken Heullitt, Chief Financial Officer. Ask for God’s guidance and wisdom in managing Moody’s finances and building upon our 127-year tradition of good stewardship.

Time to Build God's House and Put Him First

In 538 B.C., emperor Cyrus of Persia issued a decree permitting exiled Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple. The first wave of returnees, under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, laid the temple's foundation by 536 B.C. But then progress stalled, as Samaritans and others who had moved in during the years of Jewish captivity opposed the rebuilding.

By the time of Haggai, however, external adversaries were not the main reason why the temple had not been rebuilt. The people had become self-centered and spiritually lazy. Beginning in 520 B.C., Haggai prophesied specifically to the Jewish leaders and scolded them for wrong priorities.

The people had been saying it was not yet time to rebuild the temple (v. 2), but this was just an excuse. Enough years had passed since Nehemiah's time that they were no longer in survival mode. They had actually become rather well established,

as indicated by the fact that they lived in "paneled houses" (v. 4). Next to their own nice homes, the ruins of the temple served as a stark reminder of their laxness toward the covenant. As in the case of Solomon, whose palace was more extravagant than the temple he had constructed (1 Kings 6:38; 7:1), buildings served as a spiritual barometer.

Give careful thought to your ways.

Haggai 1:5

Through Haggai, God told the people to stop and think: "Give careful thought to your ways" (v. 5). They should already know their choices were dishonoring Him, since He had warned them by keeping them struggling against drought and famine (v. 6; Deut. 28:38–39). They had been busy with their own affairs and neglected their duties toward God. Haggai wasn't the only one bringing this message, as Zechariah ministered around the same time. We know their ministry met with success, because the temple was rebuilt by 516 B.C.

Apply the Word

Our God is a God of second chances, meaning that it's never too late to obey Him. If we've been too focused on building our own houses, so to speak, it's not too late to change our priorities and put Him first. If you think it's too late in life to make a change, be encouraged by the example of Haggai. Many scholars think he began his prophetic ministry in his 70s.

Pray with Us

James Chadwick, Barry Cole, Jeffery Knapp, Trevor McCarter, Charles Moeri, and Cherise Wilson represent the Investments department on Moody's Chicago campus. Pray for good teamwork and cooperation as they seek to be good stewards of our donors' generosity.

All Times Are Times to Praise the Lord

Throughout the history of the church, music has been a powerful means for praising the Lord. A modern classic is the song “Indescribable” by Chris Tomlin, which exults: “From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea, creation’s revealing your majesty . . . / Indescribable, uncontainable, you placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name. You are amazing, God.”

Amen! Psalm 34 demonstrates that all times are times to praise the Lord. David said: “I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips” (v. 1). Praise is an activity in God’s time that it’s *always* time for, regardless of circumstances. So the psalmist invited others to join in: “Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together” (v. 3).

The congregation’s praise isn’t whistling in the dark or a manufactured emotion. The

spirit of praise is founded upon God’s loving faithfulness to His people (v. 5). We can count on Him to hear, save, and deliver us (vv. 4–7). A “poor man” knows that he is utterly dependent on God. Even the lion, king of beasts, might go hungry, but “those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (v. 10). In response, we are to fear the Lord (v. 9), meaning to show Him appropriate reverence and awe, as well as to delight in Him (v. 8).

I will extol the LORD
at all times; his
praise will always
be on my lips.

Psalm 34:1

We often think of praise as a response to blessings, but it’s not limited to that. According to the superscription for this psalm, for example, it was written during a time when David was fleeing from Saul. He went so far as to take temporary refuge among the Philistines, feigning insanity to deceive his hosts (see 1 Sam. 21:10–15). Though David escaped, it doesn’t really look to us like an occasion for exalting the Lord—but Psalm 34 shows otherwise.

Apply the Word

One good way to renew a spirit of praise in our hearts is to learn a new song or hymn. It doesn’t have to be completely new, just new to us. Finding a new worship song to sing can happen by listening to Christian radio, searching through a hymnbook or collection of choruses, or visiting a website such as Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org/) or NetHymnal (<http://nethymnal.org/>).

Pray with Us

Today, let’s lift up in prayer our undergraduate and seminary students across Moody’s three campuses, as well as distance learning students across the country and around the world. May their Moody education prepare them well for Christian service.

Question and Answer

By Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of English, Literature, and Homiletics



The other day the subject of apology came up in a conversation with friends. We all wondered what the Bible has to say about the subject and where we would find examples of people who apologized well.



The Bible has a lot to say about apologizing and gives examples of people who apologized. James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed." And Matthew 5:23–24 is even more specific: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Clearly, God wants us to be at peace with one another more than He wants our material gifts.

Scripture also includes examples of people. Job apologized to God for the sins he did not realize he had committed, Joseph's brothers apologized to him for selling him into slavery, and Peter was overcome with sorrow over his betrayal of Jesus and lived the rest of his life serving Him with that recognition.

Apology is a way of recognizing and confessing one's sins. The dictionary definition is helpful here when it says it is "an expression of regret for having insulted or wronged another." Decades ago, country-western singer Brenda Lee sang in her

throaty voice a song that has remained famous: "I'm sorry, so sorry, please accept my apology, I'm sorry, so sorry, that I was such a fool." She had it right. A fool is one who lacks wisdom, prudence, or common understanding and needs to correct that lack of wisdom. It seems possible to suggest that to truly apologize, offenders must see themselves sharply, developing a clear vision of their error. For Christians, the additional element is that they do this as an act of love for God and others.



I have a friend who is always talking about the importance of being humble. He often refuses gifts other friends try to give him, will not spend money on anything that isn't absolutely necessary, and lives what I consider to be a kind of uptight life. I often feel guilty around him for going out for a good meal or paying to go to a program of healthy entertainment. It seems like he thinks it's wrong to do things that aren't strictly related to the church or missions. I get the feeling that the way he interprets humility is living in total self-denial. I'm wondering what humility really is?



I think people often misinterpret the essence of humility because it is difficult to describe. Humility is a rare virtue, seldom seen and rarely valued when it is. It is countercultural to be humble, but not in the way your friend understands it.

Continued on next page

You do not become more valuable to God than anyone else by the things you do or don't do.

Continued from previous page

Basically, it means not taking yourself too seriously, being interested in others, and understanding that you do not become more valuable to God than anyone else by the things you do or don't do. Of course we are to live soberly, which means thoughtfully, not gloomily. But the truly humble person was described by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: "A cheerful sort of chap who doesn't think of himself at all," but who is just interested in the other person.

One prominent person who comes to my mind was the famous country singer Johnny Cash who died about ten years ago. One secular commentator wrote about him, "If the measure of success is to walk with kings and never lose the common touch, Johnny Cash was at the top of the heap." Johnny Cash let everyone know what motivated his changed life. In fact, on his last album he urged his listeners to "find Jesus."

Finally, humility is primarily modeled by Jesus Christ, as described in the famous passage in Philippians 2. This is a humility that is not full of self. In the words of Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the

interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." I think Christ would have accepted others' gifts gratefully and lovingly and enjoyed a good meal and other delights.



I have told many people who Jesus is, yet so many do not believe that He is God or that He is coming back. Why is this?



There are many reasons one could list as to why people don't believe in Jesus Christ. Some people claim that they need more proof for the existence of Christ as the Bible presents Him; others say they are tripped up by the problem of pain in the world. Still others have a problem with a specific biblical teaching or doctrine.

I think more often than not people make a moral choice against a God who demands lives fully committed to a lifestyle that follows the dictates of Scripture, a way of living that puts someone besides self as the priority and moral compass. The reality is that the hearts of those who do not believe are hardened to the truth. Part of witnessing is accepting the fact that many will reject what we say even if our witness is biblical and compelling. Our place, then, is to pray specifically for these individuals, asking God to use the circumstances of their lives to lead them to be open to Him.

All Times Are Times to Trust the Lord

In *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, author Jerry Bridges admitted: “For many years in my own pilgrimage . . . I was a prisoner to my feelings. I mistakenly thought I could not trust God unless I felt like trusting Him (which I almost never did in times of adversity). Now I am learning that trusting God is first of all a matter of the will and is not dependent on my feelings. I choose to trust God, and my feelings eventually follow.”

Why should we trust God? Because He is trustworthy. Our emotions might not say so. Circumstances might not say so. But His Word says that He is always faithful. Therefore, as Psalm 62 proclaims, all times are times to trust the Lord. The key is verse 8: “Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”

David painted a vivid picture of God’s

character in this psalm. He is our refuge, our salvation, our source of hope, and our source of rest. He is a fortress and a mighty rock. He is the One who protects us, rescues us, and wins the victory for us. We are perfectly safe in saying to Him, “my times are in your hands” (Ps. 31:15).

Trust in him at all
times, you people;
pour out your
hearts to him, for
God is our refuge.

Psalm 62:8

We don’t know the occasion or background for this psalm, but David was under attack (vv. 3–4). Perhaps enemies were plotting against his throne. Perhaps they were people close to him, for he described them as treacherously saying one thing but doing another. He felt like a “tottering fence,” about to

collapse under the pressure.

Instead, he took refuge in the Lord. Having done so, he could “find rest” (vv. 1, 5). Faith and trust in God bring to one’s heart a peace that transcends human understanding (Phil. 4:7).

Apply the Word

Are your prayers feeling routine these days? Pouring out our hearts to the Lord in prayer is wise advice (v. 8). The same expression is found in Lamentations 2:19: “Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord.” This phrase suggests wholeheartedness, desperation, humility, and transparency before God.

Pray with Us

Would you pray for our Human Resources department headed by vice president Lloyd Dodson? May the Lord lead and encourage them as they work together as a team to benefit every employee at Moody.

Waiting on God's Timing for Jesus' Mission

All sorts of things, important or not, are all about timing. Passing a restaurant billboard as your stomach growls. Catching her eyes across a crowded room. Being the seventh caller and winning the prize. Hearing a sermon just when you're encountering that exact temptation. Seeing a shooting star. Running into a friend on a day you really needed some encouragement.

For Christ's mission of redemption, God's timing was crucial. One wonders what it was like for the eternal Son of God to experience the flow of time as a human being. However it felt, Jesus was committed to perfectly obeying the timing of His Father's plan, as we see in today's narrative. Knowing the right time to do the right thing was important for Him as well as for us (see Feb. 5).

Jesus' brothers (born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus' birth) advised Him to go to Judea for the Festival of

Tabernacles in order to gain more public exposure (vv. 3–4). Whether they were recommending a marketing strategy or, as it turned out, insincerely mocking Him (v. 5), the brothers showed a complete lack of understanding. Doing miracles to gain attention and "promote a career" as a miracle-working rabbi was not at all what Jesus was about.

My time is not yet here; for you any time will do.

John 7:6

Instead, Jesus was all about obeying God and submitting to His plan. "My time is not yet here," He told His brothers, "for you any time will do" (v. 6). He knew that His person and

message spurred controversy among the people and hatred from the leaders, and the time to bring things to a head had not yet come (vv. 7–8). "My time" specifically referred to His coming death and resurrection. Later (see the rest of John 7), Jesus did go to Jerusalem in secret, and then began teaching publicly about halfway through the festival.

Apply the Word

As Americans, we like to take initiative, to make a plan, to go for it. "Seize the moment" or "strike while the iron's hot" seems like good advice. But God's timing doesn't necessarily follow our cultural or personal preferences. He has His own purposes and knowledge, far superior to our own. Waiting on God's timing is far wiser than plunging ahead or forcing our own way.

Pray with Us

Moody's Library is a valuable educational resource for our students, faculty, and staff. Please support in prayer our Library team on Moody's Chicago campus: Amy Fields, Lorilee Johnson, James Preston, and Christopher Ullman.

God's Salvation Came at the Right Time

The old saying declares that death and taxes are life's only certainties. But Christian believers have another: "We will all be changed," Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15:50–57). "The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." He meant that one day we will be raised from the dead. Our future is eternal life, following in the footsteps of Jesus, "the firstborn from the dead" (Rev. 1:5). Death will be swallowed up through the victory won by our Lord Jesus Christ!

Christ triumphed over death within God's plan and timing, as the New Testament repeatedly proclaims. In today's passage, Paul affirmed that Christ did what He did "at just the right time" (v. 6; Mark 1:15; Gal. 4:4–5). Even to God, who is Himself above time, not all times are the same. Within time and human history, His plan unfolds at the right time for events to happen.

At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:6

The essence of the gospel is found in these verses—we were helpless, and Jesus died to save us. From a human perspective, this is amazing. Giving one's life for another is the pinnacle of sacrificial love (v. 7).

From a divine perspective, this is more than amazing. Jesus' death wasn't just one life for another, but the life of God's one and only Son for the lives of those who choose to believe on Him. More than helpless, we were sinners and therefore God's enemies (vv. 8, 10). Yet His blood justified us, saved us from wrath, and reconciled us to Him (vv. 9, 11).

The good news of the gospel, what God did "at just the right time" in history, is proof that His purposes will be done in our individual lives as well—"at just the right time"!

Apply the Word

We urge you to receive God's gift of salvation in Christ, if you haven't already done so. If you have, we encourage you to share this good news with the people God has put in your life. Look for His work in the hearts around you. Pray for opportunities. Then be ready to speak light into darkness and life into death, by God's grace.

Pray with Us

God has blessed Moody with a capable team of information technology specialists under the leadership of Frank Leber, vice president of Information Systems. Join us in prayer for their service at Moody, as we thank God for all their hard work.

Preach the Word in All Seasons

In modern American culture, we think like consumers. We look for special deals. We want great products at rock-bottom prices. We expect to be treated as if the customer is king. Unfortunately this sometimes extends to our churchgoing. We want to feel comfortable. The music should meet our preferences. The ministries should meet our needs. The church should give us the best value or outcome for our input.

Christians treating their faith like a consumer product is not a new phenomenon. Some in the Ephesian church also had this attitude. They wanted preaching that tickled their ears and satisfied their felt needs (vv. 3–4). Paul, though, warned Timothy to be committed to sound doctrine and to proclaiming it at all times under all conditions. Since the right time had arrived in God's plan and the mystery of Christ had been revealed, all times are now right for sharing the gospel and preaching and teaching the Word.

Preach the word;
be prepared in
season and out
of season.

2 Timothy 4:2

Paul framed the charge to his young pastor friend with high solemnity. He called God and Jesus as witnesses and contextualized his words in terms of God's kingdom and Jesus' return (v. 1). The charge itself is found in verse 2. Timothy's main task is to "preach the word," divided into several smaller tasks of correcting, rebuking, and encouraging.

This should be done with great care—instructing others in Scripture is a serious responsibility—and patiently, indicating that ministry means ongoing relationships. It should also be

done consistently or at all times, not based on convenience or when people feel like it.

Furthermore, obedience to this charge won't be easy (v. 5). Preaching the Word will mean being under pressure and enduring hardship. Even so, all times are the right time to obey and pursue our calling from God.

Apply the Word

We tend to think of encouragement as saying positive things to cheer someone up. According to today's reading, though, it can be more than that. Truth can serve to rebuke or correct a person, but it can also encourage them (v. 2; Titus 1:9). In other words, sound doctrine can bring spiritual cheer and joy into our lives by building up our faith.

Pray with Us

For the next three days, it's a privilege for us to uphold in prayer Moody undergraduate faculty from the Bible department. Today, please pray for professors John Goodrich, Ernest Gray, John Hart, and Gregory Jenks.

Taking Care With God's Time

Tennis fans were surprised in 2010 to see Rafael Nadal wearing a watch during professional matches. One of the top-ranked tennis players of our day, Nadal partnered with Richard Mille, a Swiss luxury watch company, on a timepiece that was both beautiful and durable. Not to mention expensive—the one Nadal wore last year was worth \$690,000.

Every timepiece might have a price, but calculating the worth of actual time is impossible! Now that we've explored larger biblical perspectives regarding time, today we start the third main part of this month's

study. This section deals with the practical, hands-on issue of our stewardship of time. Unlike money, everyone is given an equal amount of time to spend. Since "those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2), how do we use our time in the best possible, godly, and God-glorifying ways?

Today's passage is the familiar parable of the talents, which the NIV 2011 colorfully labels "The Parable of the Bags of Gold." In its original context, a "talent" was a measure of weight, with one talent (here, "bag") of gold being the equivalent of 20 years' normal wages. This means that all three servants in this parable were given a substantial sum of money as their responsibility.

You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.

Matthew 25:21

Several stewardship principles can be drawn from this parable, expressed here in terms of time. Like the gold, time is a God-given resource, not ours to do with as we please. We'll be held accountable

for what we do with it (v. 19). God expects that we'll invest our time wisely, looking for meaningful returns for His kingdom. Fear or playing it safe is a poor basis for such decisions (v. 25). Faithful stewards invest more boldly. One way or the other, our use of time has eternal consequences (vv. 21, 23, 29–30).

Apply the Word

The biblical priority of stewardship of time is by no means workaholicism. Scripture clearly lays out patterns of work and rest, and not everything that is valuable in God's eyes looks like modern notions of productivity. In response to today's devotion, you might consider prayerfully reviewing your schedule or calendar and reflecting on your priorities as shown in your use of time.

Pray with Us

As we continue to pray for Moody Bible faculty—William Marty, Gerald Peterman, Ronald Sauer, and Andrew Schmutzer—please ask God to bless their ministry of teaching of God's Word to our students.

God Sees Stewardship Differently

In *The Tyranny of Time*, author Robert Banks talked about how stressed we are—always busy, always tired, never enough time for everything that needs to be done. We're constantly being told to manage our time better, to be purposeful, task-oriented, efficient, and productive. "We have elevated clock time into a more important place in our lives than it warrants," he warned. Time has become an idol to which we're enslaved.

How did this happen? Because we think of time culturally rather than biblically. Good stewardship of time can involve qualities such as efficiency, for example, but it is about much more. As we've already studied this month, life has times and seasons—there is a time for work, but there are also times for rest, play, and other so-called nonproductive activities. We need to learn to see time and our stewardship of it the way God sees them—and He sees differently!

She has done
a beautiful thing
to me.

Matthew 26:10

God's perspective is well captured in today's narrative. Jesus was enjoying hospitality in the home of Simon the leper, probably a former leper whom He had healed (v. 6). During the meal, a woman entered the house and anointed His head with an expensive perfume (v. 7). Her action was an incredibly extravagant gesture of honor and respect.

Jesus' disciples, however, responded critically, based on what appeared to be noble motives and normal principles of stewardship. The perfume, they argued, should have

been sold rather than wasted, and the money given to the poor (vv. 8–9). The Lord, however, evaluated the worth of her action quite differently. In light of His imminent death and burial, Jesus approved of her anointing as a "beautiful thing," indicating both aesthetic and moral beauty (vv. 10–12). Far from being wasteful, her deed would be told throughout the world alongside the gospel narrative itself (v. 13).

Apply the Word

How can we imitate Christ's example and see stewardship differently? By counting the cost of discipleship, as Jesus recommended (Luke 14:25–33). Rather than counting the cost in terms of deciding if it is worth it or not, however, Jesus meant counting the cost in terms of giving everything we have. In this case, putting all our eggs in one basket is completely wise stewardship!

Pray with Us

Our faculty members devote their lives to training godly leaders of tomorrow's church. In conclusion of our prayer time for the Bible professors, please add Timothy Sigler, Michael Vanlaningham, Michael Wechsler, and Ben Wilson to your prayer list.

Do God's Work While We Can

Seventy million Americans either hate their jobs or have “checked out” at work, according to a recent Gallup survey. That’s out of 100 million who have full-time jobs, meaning that only 30 percent of full-time employees feel engaged or happy at work. The majority, by contrast, feel worried, stressed, or just plain bored. Gallup estimates the cost of active disengagement at about \$500 billion in lost productivity.

In light of this, one is led to wonder whether we as Christians have the proper attitude toward God’s work. Today’s reading can help us find out.

In this narrative, Jesus healed a man who had been blind since birth. A normal rabbinic argument in that day held that his handicap was a result of sin, either by him or his parents (v. 2). Jesus, however, said neither was true. The man’s blindness was part of God’s sovereign

plan (v. 3). All the sorrow of this man’s life up to that time was going to be redeemed in this very moment, miraculous proof of the healing and liberating power of the Messiah.

As He set the stage for the miracle itself, Christ drew the lesson that “we must do the works of him who sent me” while it is day (v. 4). This was specifically true for Jesus, the “light of the world” (v. 5). The night was coming—His death was imminent. He needed to complete the work given Him by His Father.

As long as it is
day, we must do the
works of him who
sent me.

John 9:4

The same principle is generally true for us as well. As long as we’re alive, we need to do the work to which God has called us. As Paul wrote, soldiers shouldn’t get “entangled in civilian affairs” (2 Tim. 2:4). Rather, we should be “making the most of every opportunity” (Eph. 5:16), or “redeeming the time” (ΚΑΙ).

Apply the Word

In light of Jesus’ explanation of the man born blind, do we see our lives and their purposes any differently? We all have suffering and times of sorrow in our lives, but our Lord is able to redeem that pain and loss through His healing and liberating power. Even in sorrow, we can rejoice in God’s sovereign stewardship over our lives. After all, we are trophies of His grace.

Pray with Us

Your prayers are important for Dr. Larry Davidhizar, vice president and dean of the Undergraduate School. Thank you for supporting in prayer the vision and the global mission of our Undergraduate School under his leadership.

Worship God While We Can

Some scientists see aging as just another illness to be cured. Aubrey de Grey, a biomedical gerontologist, recently claimed: “I’d say we have a 50/50 chance of bringing aging under what I’d call a decisive level of control within the next 25 years or so. And what I mean by decisive is the same sort of medical control that we have over most infectious diseases today.” He foresees a time when “medical maintenance” might be able to keep people alive indefinitely.

The Bible tells a different story. Sin and death entered the world together, and neither will be overcome by merely human effort. As today’s reading reminds us, aging and death are inevitable. Alongside yesterday’s exhortation to do God’s work while we can, today we conclude that we must also worship God.

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,” the final chapter of Ecclesi-

astes advises (v. 1). The verb “remember” is stronger in Hebrew than in English. It means calling or recalling to mind, but it also suggests meditating, reflecting, and being mindful or attentive. Taken together, these meanings and connotations add up to focusing on and worshiping the Lord.

Remember your
Creator in the
days of your youth,
before the days of
trouble come.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

The “days of trouble” that are coming are a reference to aging, and the remainder of the passage is a depiction of the aging process. These verses do not disrespect elderly people, but they do picture poetically the normal physical decay preceding death. Before we return to dust, typically a process of deterioration affects our bodies (v. 7). Sight, hearing, physical strength and agility are all affected for the worse. The “silver cord” of life is fragile and easily severed (v. 6). Without God in the picture, mortality robs our lives of meaning (v. 8), thus the exhortation to “remember your Creator” (vv. 1, 13).

Apply the Word

Death is part of our fallen world. For all of us, as the final section of our month’s study will show, time on earth is going to run out unless Christ returns. We’re all going to cross the river of death. But if we obey and worship the Lord while we can, that’s what will remain with us as we grow old, and our lives will have been well spent!

Pray with Us

Our Mail Service staff, Brenda McLemore and Nga Tran, welcomes your prayer support. Ask God for strength and encouragement in their daily service of processing and mailing thousands of bulk mail packages on Moody’s Chicago campus.

Making the Most of Ministry Opportunities

Faye Edgerton, a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators, spent nearly half a century living among and ministering to the Navajo Indians. An alumna of Moody Bible Institute, she learned the Navajo language and translated the New Testament. Published in 1956, it was a bestseller. The Navajos respected her so much they called her, “The One Who Understands.”

Faye Edgerton knew how to make the most of the ministry opportunities God gave her. Using His gift of time to serve and proclaim His kingdom in every way we can with every opportunity that comes our way is truly good stewardship. Just as God has prepared in advance good works for us to do (Eph. 2:10), so also is He sovereign over all ministry opportunities (vv. 2–3). He is the One who opens or closes doors. To be ready for the opportunities He sends our way requires prayer, not as one-off requests but as an ongoing posture

of watchfulness and thankfulness. In addition, we must understand that living in this way is likely to bring persecution and suffering, as in the case of the imprisoned Paul.

How should we seize ministry opportunities? How do we carry out godly evangelism and discipleship with effectiveness? First, the “mystery of Christ” must be presented clearly, without any confusion or compromise. Second, the gospel must be proclaimed boldly. If we have an opportunity, God is in it—it is not to be missed!

Third, the message must be shared wisely, in ways that are “full of grace.” Outsiders won’t automatically understand, and we shouldn’t give them a reason to criticize. Fourth, ministry should be done with attentiveness and insight. If we understand where people are coming from, we can respond to them in ways that are “seasoned with salt” (Matt. 5:13; 1 Peter 3:15).

Make the most of every opportunity.

Colossians 4:5

Apply the Word

We often use the metaphor of God opening or shutting a door to refer to His guidance in general. In the New Testament, however, this metaphor often refers specifically to opportunities for evangelism and church-planting (v. 3; Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 2:12). Have you used this metaphor this way in your prayers? Ask God for eyes to see open doors for sharing the good news!

Pray with Us

We are grateful for the service of Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing Communications. Pray for her leadership in spearheading the development and implementation of Moody’s new brand, unveiled at Founder’s Week this month.

Our Lives Are But a Breath

Before Karl Albrecht died a few years ago, he had written an unusual obituary for himself in the style of a moving notice. After his death, the notice was published in a German newspaper: “I have moved house. My new address: Olhsdorf-Ruhewald cemetery, plot Bx 65/28C. I’ll be pleased to have a lively attendance.” According to his widow, he loved playing jokes and didn’t want people to be gloomy after his passing.

No matter how we respond to the inevitability of death, it is still inevitable. According to Scripture, our lives are but a breath, quickly done and gone.

The fleetness of time and the brevity of life are the focus of this fourth and final section of our month’s study. Why would the Bible remind us of this universal truth so many times? One reason is because it makes the time-related truths we’ve been studying this month

even more urgent. Putting off the good we could do today is foolish, because tomorrow might never arrive. “No one knows when their hour will come” (Eccl. 9:12).

Typical human responses to the reality of death are to live in denial, or with false bravado, or with stoic courage. The Christian reaction, by contrast, is to actually pray for God to remind us of this truth: “Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is” (v. 4). Our lifespans are

“as nothing” and “but a breath” (v. 5). This puts our activities in harsh perspective—“heaping up wealth” is a pointless exercise, since before long we’ve passed on and become a “phantom” or ghost (v. 6). Being taught this lesson strips away false confidence and comforts, and then we can know our only hope is in God alone (vv. 7–13).

Let me know how
fleeting my life is.

Psalm 39:4

Apply the Word

A moment gone is gone forever. We sometimes joke, “That’s an hour I’ll never get back.” Perhaps this humorous phrase can help us check our use of time. Before we do our next task or activity, perhaps we should ask ourselves, “Will I regret this choice later? Does it have worth and purpose? Or at the end of the day, will I see this hour as a waste of time?”

Pray with Us

As Moody trustees arrive on our Chicago campus for their Board of Trustee meeting today and tomorrow, we ask that you pray for God’s leading in all their discussions and that they would put Him first in their decisions.

No One Knows the Day or the Hour

One of the most unusual end times hoaxes in history is known as the “Prophet Hen of Leeds.” In the town of Leeds in England in 1806, a chicken was laying eggs with the phrase “Christ is coming” written on them. Many believed judgment day was at hand. Investigators, however, found that someone had written on each egg, then forced it back up into the hen so it could be “miraculously laid” a bit later. It turned out that the hen was not a prophet, and judgment day did not arrive!

In fact, no such claim should be believed, for according to Scripture no one but God the Father knows the day or hour of Christ’s return, not even the angels or Christ Himself (v. 32; Acts 1:7). Before the Second Coming (v. 26), there will be signs and foreshadowings (vv. 28–29), but even so it will come as a surprise, though more to unbelievers than to believers (see tomorrow’s devotional).

The statement that “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (v. 30) carries a double meaning. In one sense of “generation,” Jesus was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In a more general sense, He was indicating an undefined span of time.

About that day or
hour no one knows.

Mark 13:32

The proper response, then, is watchfulness: “Be on guard! Be alert!” (v. 33; Rev. 3:3). Jesus illustrated this with a parable in which the owner of a house leaves and puts his servants in charge until he returns (vv. 34–37).

The time of his return is unknown; it could be at any time and without any warning. When he returns, the servants need to be found faithfully doing what they should be doing.

The same is true for us. When Christ returns, we do not want to be found spiritually sleeping or pursuing only trivial earthly priorities.

Apply the Word

One of the reasons for discussing the end times in Scripture is to shape our choices today. When theologians say that Christ’s return is imminent, they mean that He could return at any time! How can we live each day in watchful and joyful expectation of this? What if our first thought upon rising each morning was, “Today could be the day!” How would that change your plans?

Pray with Us

Bruce Everhart, vice president of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, relies on the prayers of Moody’s friends in his ministry at Moody. Thank you for praying for him and his teams as they expand Moody’s reach to our supporters.

Be Found Living as Children of Light

Jesus told the parable of the rich fool as a warning (Luke 12:13–21). In the story, a rich man whose fields yielded an abundant harvest made plans for bigger barns. He felt that because of his wealth he could now “Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” God, however, had marked the man for death: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.” Jesus concluded: “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Not only do we not know the day or hour of Christ’s return, we also do not know the day or hour of our own death. The best response is to live as followers of Christ so that we’re found faithful, whether we die or are still alive when Christ returns.

Paul wrote, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (v. 2).

There’s a bit of paradox here. This event will be surprising, but not utterly surprising—unexpected, but not completely so (vv. 3–4). The surprising aspect is seen in the “thief in the night” image and the fact that destruction will come when people are talking of peace and safety. On the other hand, the image of “labor pains” reminds us that end times events are part of a timeline, predictable in a sense but not precisely knowable.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

1 Thessalonians 5:4

Regardless, we are to live as “children of light” (vv. 5–11). This means that we are to be sober, awake, and alert compared to the ungodly, who are pictured as drunk, asleep, and oblivious. This also means that we are to be wearing our spiritual armor, including “faith and love as a breastplate” and “the hope of salvation as a helmet” (see also Eph. 6:10–18).

Apply the Word

The Day of the Lord is a theme in Jesus’ discourses on the end times in the Gospels (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). It’s also a theme in Old Testament book of Joel. Only three chapters long, this fascinating minor prophet would be a good choice for extra Bible reading or study. (The August 2010 issue of *Today in the Word* covered the book of Joel; it is online at www.todayintheword.com).

Pray with Us

Throughout its history, Moody Aviation has been at the forefront of bringing the gospel to the remote areas of the world. Pray for flight instructors—Jay Bigley, James Conrad, and Ian Kerrigan—as they train next generation of missionary pilots.

Time Is Short, So Live Wholeheartedly

Contemporary Christian musician Matthew West penned a popular song called “The Motions,” in which he expressed his strong desire to live each day with faith-filled purpose and vigor: “I don’t wanna go through the motions, I don’t wanna go one more day, / Without your all-consuming passion inside of me. I don’t wanna spend my whole life asking, / What if I had given everything instead of going through the motions?”

Given that our lives are brief and uncertain, we cannot afford to live with anything less than wholehearted dedication to the glory of God. In addition, “the time is short” (vv. 29–31). Christ could return at any time. Therefore, we are to live in light of eternity for things of eternal significance, as opposed to investing in “this world in its present form” (see also 1 John 2:17).

This means that no one should be consumed solely by earthly priori-

ties or events, no matter how important—even including marriage (Luke 14:26). It’s not that marriage is unimportant, or that things don’t happen that make us happy or sad, or that we don’t buy things. The point is rather that we engage in all these activities with open hands and heart, knowing that life’s ultimate meaning is located elsewhere.

The time is short.

1 Corinthians 7:29

In this sense, practically speaking, singleness is a superior state (vv. 25–28, 32–35). Looking at it pragmatically, a single person can be fully devoted to the Lord, while married

people of necessity must also pay attention to pleasing their spouses and thus their interests are divided. This was an extremely countercultural thing to say in Paul’s day, and it remains rather difficult to hear even in our own day. Despite his reasoning, Paul explicitly did not give any commands in this area (vv. 36–38); after all, marriage is a sacred covenant blessed by God.

Apply the Word

God can use our lives and relationships to bring glory to Himself. The only way that is possible is if our primary relationship is with Him. No other person—not parents, children, friends, or a spouse—should be the object of our love and devotion like our Lord. He is the ultimate relationship that determines our priorities and choices.

Pray with Us

Spend time in prayer for our education ministry under the leadership of provost and dean of education Dr. Junias Venugopal. Thank God for blessing Moody Bible Institute and ask for His hand to continue guiding this ministry.

Teach Us to Number Our Days Rightly

Among the different ways in which people cope with their mortality is the recent phenomenon of Death Cafés. In cafés, coffee shops, and community centers around the United States, people have gathered to talk about death. Nothing is out of bounds, from wills to “bucket lists” to near-death experiences. A facilitator introduces the topic, asks questions, and guides a frank discussion to help people face their fears and see the preciousness of their lives.

Moses had a “coping strategy” for dealing with the reality of death. This month, we’ve studied many aspects of time, including the brevity of life, God as Lord over all times and seasons, knowing the right time as a key to wisdom, and other issues. Among all these, what is our biblical orientation toward time? Psalm 90 answers this question.

In this psalm, Moses reflected on his life by looking to God, his “dwell-

ing place” (v. 1) and the One on whose unending love he had depended throughout his life. Time is nothing to God; for us, however, it is a death sentence (vv. 3–6). We “return to dust.” We’re like grass that withers in a day. These are not flattering images, but they put things in perspective.

Teach us to number
our days, that we
may gain a heart
of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

As if mortality weren’t enough, there’s even worse news to tell about being human (vv. 7–12). We’re sinful and cannot hide from God’s searching gaze and righteous anger. How can we bear such truths? By asking God to teach us to “number our days,” mean-

ing teach us how to live wisely. While an arrogant fool lives as if the world is of value and he can rule his own life, a wise person understands that the fleeting nature of time points us to humility and fear of the Lord.

Time, then, like every theme in the Word, highlights God’s worthiness and our worship.

Apply the Word

Psalm 90 is a sober assessment of the human condition. It’s followed in Scripture by Psalm 91, which pictures what it is like to be a person who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High” (v. 1). It is, for example, like being a baby bird nestling under the wings of its mother for protection (v. 4). As we conclude our study on time, may this image give you comfort.

Pray with Us

In conclusion, we invite you to reflect in prayer on the things God showed you in His Word this month. Let us thank Him for holding our lives in His hands and ask Him to show us how to redeem the time He has given us.

FROM THE EDITORS

Continued from page 4

To make a long year's story short, I am now a baby in God's fold and am learning His love and forgiveness each day. I work in the kitchen here and there is a small group of about eight inmates who enjoy and embrace the lessons each day. We just wanted you to know how very grateful we are for your commitment to our Savior.

I'm sorry I don't have any cash gift to send, but I fully support the ministry of Today in the Word in spirit. If I ever come into some money I would love to receive the Today in the Word Notebook, and I surely hope I continue to receive my gift of the Today in the Word devotional lessons.

I will turn 50 years old on Valentine's Day, and I'm positive that if Jesus wouldn't have had your people send me this blessing, I would not be writing on this piece of paper today. Thank you, and I love every one of you there.

*Sincerely,
Willis*

This man's powerful story of experiencing the salvation, grace, and forgiveness of Jesus through studying Scripture is one of the most encouraging letters that we've received. I wanted to share it with all of our readers because you all are also part of this man's story. Your support of *Today in the Word* has led to the transformation of this man's life from despair to hope. Your partnership with us is resulting in a Bible

study breaking out in a prison kitchen. Your gift is an act of love that God has used to break through the darkness of sin and shame to fill a prisoner's life with love for God and others.

It is only through the donations of readers who are able to support this ministry financially that we can to send *Today in the Word* into prisons. Without your gifts, we don't have the resources to extend this ministry as an act of love to people who cannot repay it financially.

We have been blessed over the years to have a community of readers who are so generous and faithful in supporting this work. In the past year, we noticed that our number of readers has gone up, for which we are thankful. But our number of financial partners has gone down. If you are able to give to this ministry as an act of love, we want to remind you that your gift goes beyond your own copies of *Today in the Word* arriving each month. Your donations make it possible for others to receive the gift of studying God's Word.

We have so many other letters that we could share of how God is using this ministry to give people a deeper knowledge of His Word and to bring them into a closer relationship with Him. You might have your own testimony of how a particular study or a particular devotional reached you where you were at just the right time and blessed you. It is an honor to be part of this ministry, and we want to be faithful in our call to share *Today in the Word* to whoever requests it, no matter where they are.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

This month, when we celebrate love, will you consider an additional financial gift if you're able to support *Today in the Word*? Willis's birthday is on Valentine's Day—what a beautiful testimony of God's love if we would be able to honor his desire to continue growing in his faith and receiving *Today in the Word* by giving a gift to this ministry as an act of love! It's an opportunity to express

our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and to do something for them that will have spiritual dividends for years to come.

May God bless you richly through His love, and may each of us be faithful to share that love with others—not just at Valentine's Day, but throughout the year.

How to Give

We appreciate and value gifts of any amount to support the ministry of *Today in the Word*.

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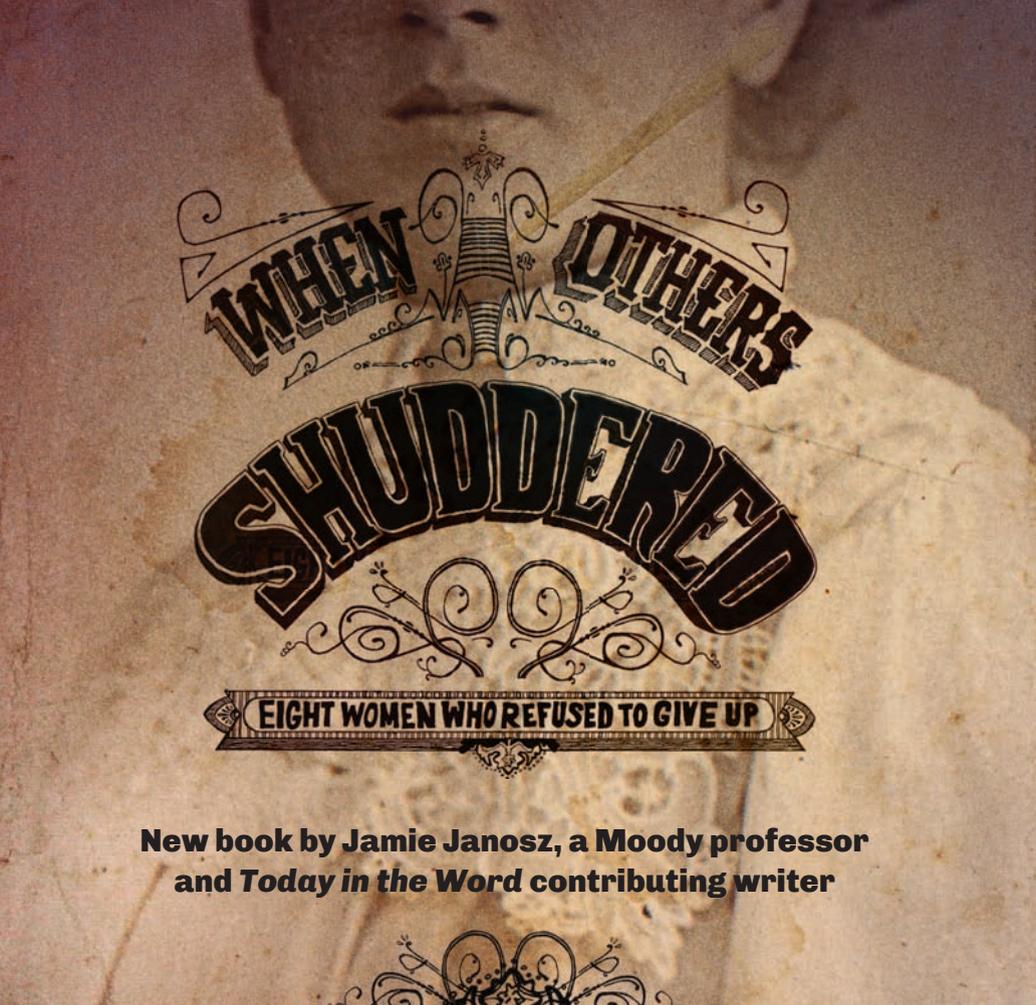
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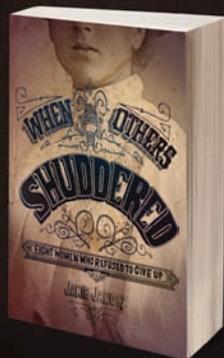
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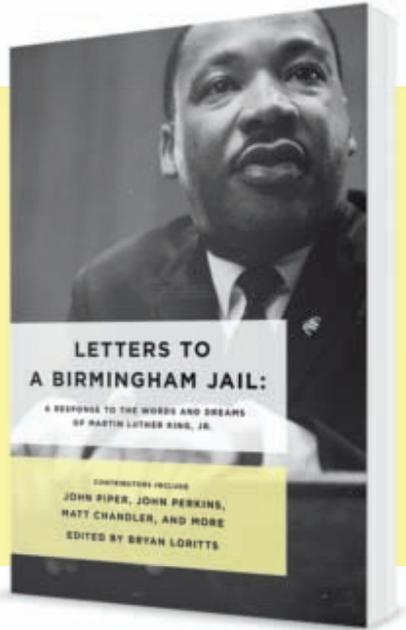
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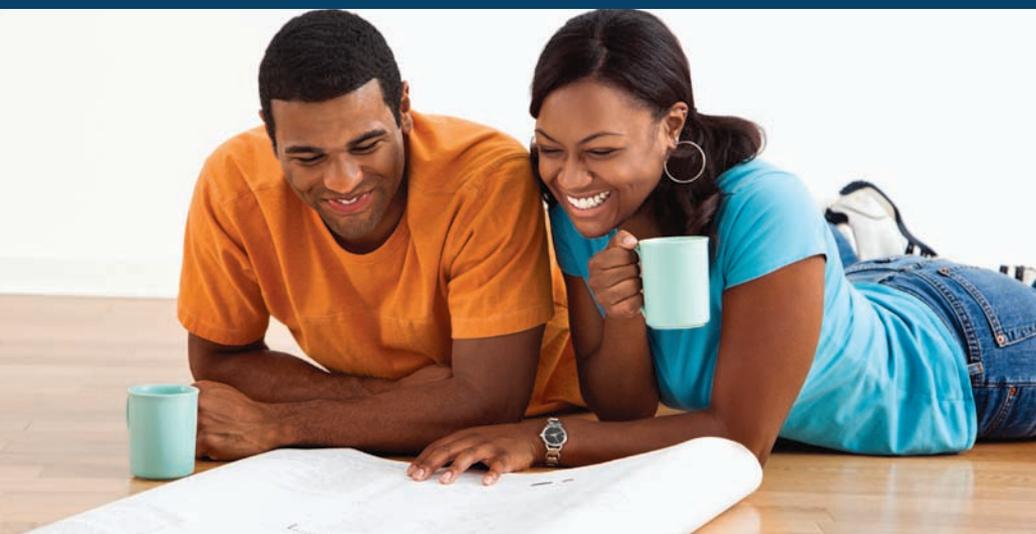
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